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Leak of Stealth Data Is Painted As a Dangerous Election Ploy

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A draft report to a House subcommittee charged yesterday that the release of information last year about the super-secret Stealth aircraft was an election ploy by the Carter administration that seriously damaged U.S. security.

The report presented to the House Armed Services subcommittee on investigations urged "a total revamping of Defense Department procedures for the protection of classified security information."

The probe into department procedures began last August following news reports on development of the Stealth aircraft, a new-generation plane intended to avoid detection by enemy radar and other warning systems.

Those reports were confirmed by then-Defense Secretary Harold Brown, who said he was trying to head off further damage resulting from additional press leaks.

But the subcommittee's draft report rejected that argument.

"The release of this information in a formal press conference was a serious mistake and did serious damage ... to the security of the United States and our ability to deter or to contain a potential Soviet threat," the report said.

"The press conference gave the Soviets information of far more value than was contained in the earlier

leaks. It amounted to official confirmation

"The release of information about Stealth in the formal press conference was done to make the Defense Department and the administration look good in an election year, and not, as claimed, for the purposes of damage-limitation."

The report said not enough evidence was available to determine if the original leaks were "orchestrated by the administration in order to justify a formal press conference."